

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
COUNTY OF ALBANY

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R.L.,

Plaintiff,

COMPLAINT

-against-

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ALBANY, NEW
YORK; LaSALLE SCHOOL, INC.; and THE BROTHERS OF
THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS DISTRICT OF EASTERN
NORTH AMERICA, INC.,

Index No. _____

Defendants.

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TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK:

Plaintiff, R.L., by and through undersigned counsel, respectfully shows to this Court and alleges as follows:

Introduction

This is a revival action brought pursuant to the New York Child Victims Act, CPLR § 214-g. The Plaintiff, when he was a minor, was sexually assaulted by Fr. Joseph Romano, a priest formerly employed by the Diocese of Albany and assigned to the LaSalle School in Albany, New York.

Parties, Jurisdiction and Venue

1. Plaintiff, R.L., is a foreign citizen and resident of Jamaica. Plaintiff brings this Complaint using his initials because of the sensitive nature of the allegations of child sexual abuse in the Complaint, which is a matter of the utmost intimacy. Plaintiff fears embarrassment and further psychological damage if his identity as a victim of child sexual abuse were to become

publicly known. His identity will be made known to Defendant, at the latest, upon service of the Summons and Complaint.

2. Defendant, The Roman Catholic Diocese Of Albany, New York is a religious institution and organization with principal offices located at 40 North Main Avenue, Albany, New York, 12203. The Diocese of Albany controls all Catholic religious, pastoral and educational functions in the counties of Albany, Columbia, Delaware, Fulton, Greene, southern Herkimer, Montgomery, Otsego, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren, and Washington, New York. The Diocese operates and controls approximately 129 parishes and 26 schools. The Diocese is a citizen and resident of the State of New York. Defendant Diocese controls all Catholic schools within its jurisdiction, including Defendant LaSalle School. Any priest ministering within the Diocese's territory may only do so with the authority of Diocese.

3. Defendant, LaSalle School, Inc. ("La Salle"), operates the LaSalle School, a Catholic school located in Albany, New York.

4. Defendant, Brothers of the Christian Schools District of Eastern North America, Inc., (hereinafter referred to as "Christian Brothers") is a not-for-profit corporation organized under the laws of the State of New Jersey with a principal place of business in New Jersey. The Christian Brothers are a religious order within the Catholic Church. At all relevant times, The LaSalle School was owned, managed and operated by the Christian Brothers.

5. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction of this action pursuant to Article VI of the New York Constitution.

6. Personal jurisdiction lies over Defendants as they are present and domiciled in the State of New York.

7. Venue of this action lies in Albany County and a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred in Albany County or one of the Defendants resides in Albany County.

Facts of Sexual Abuse

8. Plaintiff was a student at the LaSalle School, a boarding school for troubled youth, in Albany, New York.

9. Fr. Joseph Romano was a priest employed by the Diocese of Albany. He volunteered to serve as the Priest at the LaSalle School, and was assigned by the Diocese to be the Priest and Diocese's agent at the LaSalle School.

10. Upon information and belief, Fr. Joseph Romano was assigned to the LaSalle School as a Priest from approximately 1981-1984.

11. Fr. Joseph Romano sexually assaulted Plaintiff on multiple occasions, beginning in approximately 1981 when Plaintiff was approximately 13 years old.

12. The acts of sexual assault committed by Fr. Romano included the fondling of Plaintiff's genitals and performing oral sex on Plaintiff.

13. In approximately 1982, Plaintiff informed Brother Bryce Wilder, the Executive Director for the LaSalle School, and staff member Sister Adelle, that he was being abused by Fr. Romano. Despite this report, no one from the Diocese or LaSalle instituted any corrective measures. Fr. Romano continued his work and services at the LaSalle School, and continued to have unfettered access to Plaintiff, and as a result the sexual abuse of Plaintiff continued.

14. Upon information and belief, Fr. Romano was at all relevant times a serial sexual predator who sexually abused multiple boys as a Priest.

15. Fr. Romano was accused of sexually assaulting another student at LaSalle School from approximately 1980-1981. The Diocese ultimately removed Fr. Romano from ministry

following what they deemed to be two credible allegations of sexual abuse in 2002, which dated back to the 1970s and 1980s.

16. At all relevant times, the Diocese, Christian Brothers and LaSalle knew or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known that Fr. Romano had a propensity for the conduct which caused injury to Plaintiff, in particular, that he had a propensity to engage in the sexual abuse of children.

17. At all relevant times, it was reasonably foreseeable to the Diocese, Christian Brothers and LaSalle that Fr. Romano would commit acts of child sexual abuse or assault on a child.

18. At all relevant times, the Diocese, Christian Brothers and LaSalle knew or should have known that Fr. Romano was unfit, dangerous, and a threat to the health, safety and welfare of the minors entrusted to his counsel, care and/or protection.

19. With such actual or constructive knowledge, the Diocese, Christian Brothers and LaSalle provided Fr. Romano unfettered access to Plaintiff and gave him the opportunity to commit foreseeable acts of child sexual abuse or assault.

Diocese's Concealment of Acts of Sexual Abuse by Priests

20. The Bishop of the Diocese at all relevant times knew that Priests of the Diocese, under his supervision and control, were grooming and sexually molesting children with whom the Priests would have contact in their ministry and pastoral functions. At all relevant times, the Bishop knew that this was a widespread, ubiquitous and systemic problem in the Diocese, involving many Priests and numerous victims.

21. In 2018, the Diocese released a list of its clergy, acknowledging what it deemed credible allegations of child sexual abuse that had been made against the listed clergymen. These

clergymen are acknowledged to have abused children within the Diocese over decades. The list includes Fr. Romano.

22. Despite receiving credible allegations of child sexual abuse against clergy, the Diocese acted to conceal these allegations in an effort to avoid scandal and accountability.

23. This concealment was in accordance with a policy of the Diocese, as agent, and the Holy See, as principal. In 1922, the Holy See released a confidential document to its Bishops and other officials of Catholic organizations regarding the handling of cases of solicitation of sex in the confessional. This document mandated a specific procedure for Holy See's agents, including the Bishop of the Diocese, to use when a cleric abused children using the confessional. This document required strict secrecy. The 1922 document showed that the Holy See and its agents were fully aware that there was a systemic problem of clergy sexually molesting children using the confessional.

24. In 1962, the Holy See released the confidential document, *Instruction on The Manner of Proceeding in Cases of Solicitation* (The Vatican Press, 1962) (hereinafter referred to as "*Crimen Sollicitationis*"). The heading of the document states, "From the Supreme and Holy Congregation of the Holy Office To All Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops and Other Diocesan Ordinaries 'Even of the Oriental Rite,'" and contains specific instructions regarding the handling of child sex abuse by clergy. According to the document itself, it is an "instruction, ordering upon those to whom it pertains to keep and observe it in the minutest detail." *Crimen Sollicitationis* at paragraph 24.

25. The 1962 document reinforced that the Holy See and its agents to whom the documents was directed had knowledge that there was a systemic problem of Catholic clergy sexually molesting children using the confessional.

26. At the same time, the Holy See was involved in the formation of secret facilities in the United States where sexually offending clergy would be sent for short periods of time. In 1962-63, Fr. Gerald Fitzgerald reported to the Pope on the problem of abuse of children by clergy and expressed concerns if these priests were returned to active duty.

27. Fr. Fitzgerald's reports were kept secret under the Holy See's standing policy to avoid scandal at all costs. It's recommendation was ignored, however, and instead the Holy See made a choice to return known offending priests to active duty. At this point, it is clear that the Holy See and its agents, including the Diocese, knew they had a widespread problem of clergy sexually molesting minors, and they participated in the creation and the operation of facilities in the United States where sexually offending clergy could be sent before they were moved to another parish to work and potentially abuse again.

28. The Holy See's policy of secrecy under penalty of immediate removal from the organization (excommunication) for all involved in an accusation of child sexual abuse created a shroud of secrecy insulating Priests from consequence. Through this policy and others, the Holy See and its agents, including the Diocese, knowingly allowed, permitted and encouraged child sex abuse by the Diocese's Priests.

29. The Holy See mandates secrecy for all those involved, including agents and itself, in handling allegations of sexual abuse. Penalties for child sexual abuse include an order to move offending priests to other locations once they have been determined to be "delinquent." In response to allegations, the document mandates that supplementary penalties include: "As often as, in the prudent judgment of the Ordinary, it seems necessary for the amendment of the delinquent, for the removal of the near occasion [of soliciting in the future], or for the prevention of scandal or reparation for it, there should be added a prescription for a prohibition of remaining in a certain place." *Crimen Sollicitations* at paragraph 64. Under this policy of secrecy and

transfers or reassignments, all involved are threatened with excommunication and, thus, damnation, if they do not comply.

30. The policy of secrecy and the severest of penalties for its violation were reiterated in documents issued by officials of the Holy See for the benefit of its agents, including the Bishop of the Diocese, in 1988 and 2001.

31. The policies and practices of the Diocese designed to conceal sexual abuse by clergy and protect it from scandal and liability included the following:

- (a) transfer and reassignment of clergy known or suspected to abuse minors to deflect attention from reports or allegations of child sexual abuse;
- (b) concealing from parishioners and even other clergy that a priest reassigned to their parish posed a danger of sexual abuse to children;
- (c) failing to alert parishioners from the Priest's prior assignments that their children were exposed to a known or suspected child molester;
- (d) failing to report sexual abuse to criminal authorities; and
- (e) otherwise protecting and fostering the interests of abusive clergy to the detriment of the victims and the community, for the purpose of avoiding scandal and public scrutiny.

32. The Christian Brothers operated under the same policies and procedures of the Holy See set forth above, which pertained to its operation of the LaSalle School.

33. Indeed, the policy of secrecy and lack of consequences for the sexual abuse of children was perceived as a perquisite by clergy sex abusers. The Holy See, Diocese and Christian Brothers believed it to be perceived as a perquisite, which they condoned and used to their advantage in controlling Priests.

34. Plaintiff was in a zone of foreseeable harm as a child engaged in Catholic activities in close proximity to or with Catholic clergy.

35. The Diocese and Christian Brothers were in the best position to protect against the risk of harm as they knew of the systemic problem and foreseeable proclivities of Priests to sexually abuse children.

36. At all relevant times, while the Diocese and Christian Brothers had special and unique knowledge of the risk of child sexual abuse by Priests, such Priests who would prey on children were outside the reasonable contemplation of the Catholic community and families who trusted Priests to have access to their children.

37. Plaintiff and his parents had no opportunity to protect Plaintiff against a danger that was solely within the knowledge of the Diocese, Christian Brothers and LaSalle.

38. Upon information and belief, after Plaintiff was abused, the Diocese engaged in a plan and scheme pursuant to the Holy See's secrecy policies and practices to avoid discovery of Fr. Romano's child sexual abuse and the Diocese's wrongful conduct which facilitated the sexual abuse of young children.

Nature of Conduct Alleged

39. This action alleges physical, psychological and emotional injuries suffered as a result of conduct which would constitute a sexual offense on a minor as defined in Article 130 of the New York Penal Law, including without limitation, conduct constituting rape (consisting of sexual intercourse) (N.Y. Penal Law §§ 130.25 – 130.35); criminal sexual act (consisting of oral or anal sexual conduct) (N.Y. Penal Law §§ 130.40 – 130.53), and/or sexual abuse (consisting of sexual contact) (N.Y. Penal Law §§ 130.55 – 130.77).

40. The limitation of liability set forth in CPLR Art. 16 is not applicable to the claim of personal injury alleged herein, by reason of one or more of the exemptions provided in CPLR

§ 1602, including without limitation, that Defendants acted with reckless disregard for the safety of others, including Plaintiff, or knowingly or intentionally, in concert with Fr. Romano, to retain Fr. Romano with unfettered access to children.

COUNT I
NEGLIGENCE
(against LaSalle)

41. Plaintiff repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 40 above.

42. At all material times, LaSalle and Plaintiff were in a special relationship of school – student, in which LaSalle owed Plaintiff a duty of reasonable care.

43. At all material times, LaSalle and Fr. Romano were in a special relationship of school-educator/supervisor, in which LaSalle owed a duty to control the acts and conduct of Fr. Romano to prevent foreseeable harm.

44. LaSalle owed a duty to Plaintiff to use reasonable care to protect the safety, care, well-being and health of the Plaintiff while he was under the care, custody or in the presence of LaSalle. LaSalle's duties encompassed the retention and supervision of Fr. Romano and otherwise providing a safe environment for Plaintiff.

45. LaSalle breached these duties by failing to protect the minor R.L. from sexual assault and lewd and lascivious acts committed by an agent and employee of the school.

46. At all relevant times, the school created an environment which fostered child sexual abuse against children it had a duty to protect, including Plaintiff.

47. At all relevant times, LaSalle had inadequate policies and procedures to protect children it was entrusted to care for and protect, including Plaintiff.

48. As a direct and proximate result of LaSalle's negligence, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer severe and permanent psychological, emotional and physical injuries, shame,

humiliation and the inability to lead a normal life.

49. LaSalle's acts and conduct shows a reckless or willful disregard for the safety and well-being of R.L.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against LaSalle for compensatory damages, punitive damages, costs and such other and further relief as this Court deems proper.

COUNT II
NEGLIGENCE
(against the Diocese of Albany)

50. Plaintiff repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 40 above.

51. At all material times, the Diocese and Plaintiff were in a special relationship, in which Plaintiff received ministry and pastoral care from the Diocese's clergy. In this special relationship, the Diocese owed Plaintiff a duty of reasonable care.

52. At all material times, the Diocese and Fr. Romano were in a special relationship of employer – employee, in which the Diocese owed a duty to control the acts and conduct of Fr. Romano to prevent foreseeable harm.

53. The Diocese owed a duty to Plaintiff to use reasonable care to protect the safety, care, well-being and health of the Plaintiff while he was under the care, custody or in the presence of the Diocese. The Diocese's duties encompassed the retention and supervision of Fr. Romano and otherwise providing a safe environment for Plaintiff.

54. The Diocese breached these duties by failing to protect the minor R.L. from sexual assault and lewd and lascivious acts committed by an agent and employee of the Diocese.

55. At all relevant times, the Diocese created an environment which fostered child sexual abuse against children it had a duty to protect, including Plaintiff.

56. At all relevant times, the Diocese had inadequate policies and procedures to protect children it was entrusted to care for and protect, including Plaintiff.

57. As a direct and proximate result of the Diocese's negligence, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer severe and permanent psychological, emotional and physical injuries, shame, humiliation and the inability to lead a normal life.

58. The Diocese's acts and conduct shows a reckless or willful disregard for the safety and well-being of R.L.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against the Diocese of Albany for compensatory damages, punitive damages, costs and such other and further relief as this Court deems proper.

COUNT III
NEGLIGENCE
(against the Christian Brothers)

59. Plaintiff repeats and realleges Paragraphs 1 through 40 above.

60. At all material times the Christian Brothers, as principal, and LaSalle, as agent, were in an agency relationship, such that it acted on the Christian Brothers' behalf, in accordance with the Christian Brothers' instructions and directions on all matters, including those relating to day to day operations of the LaSalle School. The acts and omissions of LaSalle in the operation of the School were subject to the Christian Brothers' control, and LaSalle consented to act subject to the Christian Brothers' control.

61. At all material times, the Christian Brothers' and Plaintiff were in a special relationship of school – student, in which the Christian Brothers owed Plaintiff a duty of reasonable care.

62. At all material times, the Christian Brothers and Fr. Romano were in a special relationship of school-educator/supervisor, in which the Christian Brothers owed a duty to control the acts and conduct of Fr. Romano to prevent foreseeable harm to students.

63. The Christian Brothers owed a duty to Plaintiff to use reasonable care to protect

the safety, care, well-being and health of the Plaintiff while he was under the care, custody or in the presence of the Christian Brothers. The Christian Brothers' duties encompassed the retention and supervision of Fr. Romano and otherwise providing a safe environment for Plaintiff.

64. The Christian Brothers breached these duties by failing to protect the minor R.L. from sexual assault and lewd and lascivious acts committed by an agent and employee of the Christian Brothers.

65. At all relevant times, the Christian Brothers created an environment which fostered child sexual abuse against children it had a duty to protect, including Plaintiff.

66. At all relevant times, the Christian Brothers had inadequate policies and procedures to protect children it was entrusted to care for and protect, including Plaintiff.

67. As a direct and proximate result of the Christian Brothers' negligence, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer severe and permanent psychological, emotional and physical injuries, shame, humiliation and the inability to lead a normal life.

68. The Christian Brothers' acts and conduct shows a reckless or willful disregard for the safety and well-being of R.L.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against the Christian Brothers for compensatory damages, punitive damages, costs and such other and further relief as this Court deems proper.

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff demands a jury trial in this action.

Dated: New York, New York
September 17, 2019

Respectfully submitted,

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